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SOME PLAIN THINKING ABOUT

CENTRAL AMERICA

BY

ROCK SALT

NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

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PART 1: SOME PLAIN THINKING ABOUT CENTRAL AMERICA

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I. A drive in the mountains.

My home is in Colorado, and I have spent countless hours enjoying the mountains of that state. When driving through those mountains, I would often have the occasion to travel over one of the mountain passes that marks the continental divide of the United States. On each occasion, I invariably reflect on the elementary yet amazing reality of nature that causes two drops of water which strike the ground only inches apart to produce such dramatically different results. One drop will find its way to the Atlantic Ocean, while the drop falling only inches away will ultimately reach the Pacific. I recalled these rather unusual reflections recently following a panel discussion at the National War College concerning US foreign policy in Central America. The panel consisted of two prominent experts on the region--both former high level officials in the Reagan Administration. Both agreed that the conditions of poverty in the region and the threat from communist sponsored insurgencies were the most pressing threats to US interests in the region. But just as the two drops of water started so close together, yet ended oceans apart; these two experts who started so close to agreement on the nature of the problem, ended just as far apart on their view of the

right foreign policy for the United States in Central America.

One view framed the problem in a classic east-west context. He spoke of the need to encourage democracies in the region and to help these democratic governments to defend themselves. He argued that it was only after these fragile democracies could provide for their own security that the economic progress so desperately needed could proceed. He clearly saw Cuba and Nicaragua as principal sources of support for factions that would threaten the democracies in the region, and insisted that the Reagan Administration's efforts to support the Contras in Nicaragua were essential to protecting US interests in the region.

The second panelist saw the solution to the problem quite differently. To him the threats to these fragile democracies were the appalling living conditions that the people in these democracies are forced to endure. He argued that all the military victories in the world would not solve this problem and that this enduring reality of poverty would only ensure new insurgencies and lingering conflict. He argued that US foreign policy needed to focus--as the abiding priority--on the solution to the conditions of abject poverty in the region. He offered that US leverage in the region is very real, and that this leverage must be used to bring about social change in the region. He further argued (as did ultimately a majority in the House of

Representatives), that the Administration's Contra policy fundamentally diverted attention from the real problems in the region, thereby undermining any chance for progress toward a genuine solution.

At the end of the panel discussion, I tried to identify areas in their presentations that were common. I could not. Upon reflection, it seemed to me that while both were right, both were also wrong. The nature of the current debate is such that one's starting point essentially preordains his conclusions. In the debate on US policy for Central America, the preferred solutions for one dimension of the problem are radically different from and seemingly interfere with the solutions for the other. PART 1 of this paper attempts to start from scratch; to review the US interests in the region, to discuss the threats to those interests and then to develop a basis for US policy in Central America. PART 2 then takes this basis and roughly examines two key issues affecting the region, drugs and insurgency, and assesses some of the aspects of US policy in light of this basis. This is not intended to represent another "experts view" of the problem or the solution, (I am certainly no expert on either Central America or foreign policy). Instead, this paper is an attempt to devote some "plain thinking" to the problem and the solutions we seek.

## II. Pheasant hunting on the Snake River.

I had the good fortune five years ago to be stationed in Eastern Washington. One of the many friends I remember there is a man named Bill Holmes, who introduced me to the joys of pheasant hunting--one of which has nothing to do with hunting at all. On practically every trip, usually up to the most inassessable sections of the Snake River, we would find the time to sip some bourbon and proceed to go about solving all the world's problems. In these discussions--and in countless others with scores of other such "experts"--I have come to believe that there are really only three reasons that most American's will agree are important enough to either send their sons and daughters to war or agree to have their taxes raised in order to support. I believe those three reasons are:

1. To provide for the security of the United States and the freedoms it provides for us.
2. To defend the quality of our way of life and protect the welfare of our people.
3. To assist other peoples in their quest for freedom and a higher quality of life.

I further believe that foreign policy objectives that genuinely meet any of these reasons will be supported by the

American people and ultimately by the Congress. For the purposes of this paper, I will use these three reasons as a reasonable starting point to examine US interests in Central America.<sup>1</sup>

In seeking to examine these interests with respect to Central America, it is useful to look at the problem initially from two different directions. The first is to consider the potential "positive" contributions the region could provide for the United States; the second is to look at the region in "negative" terms--as possible threats to our interests. For while it is important to understand and adequately respond to the threats to US interests, (like poverty and insurgency), I believe the basis for an enduring foreign policy in the region must be ultimately based on positive goals and objectives.

Thus, the first phase of this examination of specific US interests in Central America sought to find "positive" items of value that would enhance the security or improve the prosperity of the United States, (reasons one and two above). I tried and I failed to find such an item of value. Unlike in South America, where natural resources, potential markets for US products and emerging industrial powers offer impressive potential for genuine value to the United States--the countries in Central America seem only to provide potential threats to our security and prosperity. I concluded that the only potential area of "positive" value

in the region would exist in the third reason stated above. In reflecting on this reason--the desire to help others--I concluded that there is positive value (as distinct from the "negative" type), in the intangible arena of seeking goodwill and friendly relations with countries that are so close to us. I further believe that this notion of seeking to be "friendly neighbors" is currently the only genuine positive interest for the United States in the region. Yet, because this value is "softer" than the military and economic interests we seek elsewhere in the world, it becomes much more difficult to shape a coherent "positive" policy for the region.

The second phase of this review of our interests in Central America looked from the negative perspective; the threats or potential threats to vital US interests. There are many:

- o The rise in insurgencies--all except the one the US supports, with a strong anti-American bias--threatens the stability of governments in the region. If successful, these insurgencies could lead to an unfriendly neighbor on our southern border, with important inroads and possible bases of operation for our major adversary.

- o The incredible poverty and skewed distribution of wealth either drives many people in the region to seek a better life in the United States, (often illegally), or take up arms with the insurgents.



- o The involvement of the region in the production and traffic of illegal drugs.

- o The crippling effects of the foreign debt owed by these countries.

Finally, I return to my third "reason" for US involvement in Central America--the desire to assist the people in the region to attain a marginally acceptable quality of life. For in Central America there remains the inescapable reality that the people do not share the fundamental freedoms which are basic to the dignity of humankind. I believe most American's genuinely support US efforts which seek to improve the freedom and quality of life for our neighbors in the region.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the problem at hand in developing a basis for our foreign policy in Central America is one of seeking to be a part of the current move toward national maturity in the region, (the positive dimension), while working to diminish the real threats to our own interests, (the negative side).<sup>3</sup> This is a problem we ought to be able to solve.

### III. On pancakes.

I was having a particularly intense discussion with my buddy Wes one day, when he uttered what I consider one of the great truths of life. At a time when I seemed to have my argument wrapped, sealed and ready for the shelf, he

reminded me, "Rock, no matter how thin you make a pancake, it still has two sides."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, before I get too far along in this paper, I believe it is important to look at another side of this question of interests. We need to consider the vital interests of the Central American countries as those countries perceive them. In the most basic sense, I believe, they see their interests in very similar terms to the US interests discussed in section II above: these countries seek a secure peace, they hope for a prosperity that could provide their people with basic needs, and they desire to retain their unique social and cultural identity while moving toward the attainment of liberal democratic value, (values described in the OAS Charter and the Rio Treaty). In addition, I believe it is important to add a fourth dimension--a fourth category of interest that is unique perhaps to Latin America. This added interest is the intense desire for independence from the United States. These countries seek a self-image in which they are allowed, even expected, to act in their own behalf without the pervasive involvement of the United States; yet this desire is balanced by the ironic and almost equal fear of abandonment by the United States. While most Central American countries are acutely aware of their economic, political and psychological dependence on the US, they intensely desire to become more mature, self-sufficient nations.<sup>5</sup>

#### IV. Some plain thinking about the problem.

Sometimes it's hard to see the forest through the trees. There are so many problems, all seemingly interrelated, all seeming so impossible to solve that the temptation is to just drop back 15 yards and punt. But as I look at the interests of the US and compare these with the interests in the region, there seems to be a genuine prospect for a basis for US policy which accommodates both sets of interests. At the risk of stating the obvious, it is clear to me that the ultimate key to US policy in this region is to focus on the positive dimension of US interests--the genuine development of the countries of the region. If we could imagine the region as a group of self-sufficient and responsible governments who were able to provide for the security, prosperity and dignity of its citizens, much of the problem would be resolved. If these countries could develop into more mature nations, this development would in itself reduce the threats to our interests while attaining their own. On the other hand, we can see from our own history that working only on the negative has not eliminated these threats--holes in the dike pop up all the time--while the positive interests are not addressed.

By returning to our starting point for this essay, we can perhaps identify the key problem in seeking a broadly accepted, publicly supported foreign policy for Central

America. Both perspectives that I briefly outlined at the beginning of this paper focus on "negative" threats, (insurgency and poverty), to US interests in the region. But both perspectives are flawed in that neither accepts a broader and more fundamental "positive" objective. I suggest the overriding imperative for US policy in Central America must be to support the broader policy objective of fostering national development in these countries. I believe it is precisely this point that has foiled our attempts to build a consensus for foreign policy in the region--and precisely this point that offers a path to that consensus.

But talking about "national development" and agreeing on what that means can be two different things. It is not my purpose in this paper to develop a new theory of third world development, for there are ample numbers of experts who know far more about it than I. For my purposes, it will be sufficient merely to outline some generally accepted ideas on the nature of responsible governments. The following characteristics of such governments--each highlighting an area that is particularly weak in most of Central America--provide a starting point of reference. None of these characteristics will come quickly or easily. All require a level of trust that currently does not exist in the Central American countries. All must be developed patiently and nurtured carefully in each country.

o Identity. The country must go about the task of building a national identity, of developing the positive self-image of all people as citizens of the nation.

o Legitimacy. The government must develop the sense of trust from its people that it can genuinely respond to the popular expectations of its citizens.

o Participation. The opportunity for real participation must extend to all citizens. The US cannot create a democracy. We can only create the conditions where this opportunity for participation is improved.

o Institution building. Each country must develop the institutions--executive, legislative and judicial--at the local and national level that are essential to legitimate government.

o Distribution. The wealth and resources of the nation must be distributed in a way that guarantees the basic human dignity of its citizens.<sup>6</sup>

In describing the nature of these governments which we seek to nurture, I earlier used the terms self-sufficient, secure, responsible and respect for human dignity. While these ideas may seem simple enough, I believe it is important to reflect and understand these concepts and the likely consequences for the US and our neighbors as they begin to reach these new levels of national maturity.

a. Self-sufficiency. While it is clear that a country which needs little outside aid has reached an important maturity in its development, this achievement is not without its impact on the United States. A country approaching self-sufficiency will be obviously less dependent on the United States and therefore less overtly leveraged to support specific US interests. It would be normal for these countries to seek closer relations with other nations, even the Soviet Union and its allies. The key for policy makers in the United States is to respect that natural outgrowth of self-sufficiency in a developing country and trust that the ultimate strength of our own values, economic example and friendship will ultimately prevail. Just as our development assistance in Europe and Japan after World War II produced self-sufficient and independent allies in those countries, we should not become alarmed--in fact we should see it as a success--at the initial signs of independence in the Central American countries.

b. Security. No government can succeed if it cannot provide for the basic security of its citizens, and this is a real challenge for much of Central America. In part, the insurgencies in the region are the result of frustrated expectations by groups within these countries. Governments can do much to improve their security problem by genuinely addressing these frustrations. But these insurgencies also are often supported by external governments. All countries in the region should move to halt the exportation of war

from country to country. It is a valid US policy objective to assist these countries--both with military and humanitarian aid--as they move to end the wars in their countries. It is also a valid and appropriate US policy objective to seek unilaterally to eliminate the external support from Cuba and the Soviet Union for insurgencies in the region.

c. Responsibility. A responsible country is allowed--is expected--to make decisions for the best interests of that country. At times, these decisions will be counter to US interests--and we must respect their prerogative to make those choices. A responsible country is also held accountable and must accept the consequences of its choices. It is not a help to the United States or the countries of Central America to have the US serve the role as a "doting parent" who is always there to provide the answer. That approach only fosters resentment and ultimately erodes the self-image and confidence of these countries.

d. Human dignity. The ultimate responsibility of a government is to provide for the needs of its citizens. In Central America in particular, the attainment of essential human needs is grossly lacking. In particular, the region contains masses of people who lack food, shelter and jobs. Attaining these fundamental elements of human dignity is the essence of maturity in a nation and the essential mark of

legitimate government. A government that looks away from its moral responsibility to provide this basic human dignity for its citizens cannot progress, and will ultimately fall to revolutionary change. US policy must support the development of human dignity in the region--American public support will accept no less. This reality is the essence of responsible government, and must be central to our efforts. It is not a goal that will come quickly or easily, but we must always seek it. For if we yield on this point, we both contribute to the problem in the region and also erode our own values.

#### V. A basis for policy.

I propose that the basis for United States policy in Central America needs to have a positive basis--to seek attainment of US interests in the region. I believe this focus provides a more effective basis than one which merely seeks to react to threats, no matter how serious those threats seem to be. I further propose that the ideas presented above form the right basis for US policy in Central America. I note that the word "democracy" was not used, not because that isn't a worthy goal, but because the countries of the region need more than the democratic processes of US-style democracy. More important than democracy itself, these countries need the will to adapt the core values of our democracy, the values described at least in part in the preceding section. If that will can be



developed, the adoption of appropriate democratic processes will certainly follow. If these core values do not mature in these countries, all the democratic mechanisms in the world will not solve the problem or serve the interests of the United States. The key is nation building--but nation building in the image of Western values. Given the societal starting point of the Central American countries, this will certainly be a long and difficult, but not impossible, undertaking. I propose now to review briefly two areas of US concern in the region, drugs and insurgency, in the light of this basis, and then conclude with some thoughts on nation building as part of the larger national strategy.

## PART 2: SOME FLAIN THINKING ON CHOICES FOR CENTRAL AMERICA

### I. Drugs: Lessons from a rhinoceros.

In one of my elective courses at the National War College, we spent several weeks reviewing the US efforts to eradicate and interdict the Latin American sources of drugs to the United States. It turned out to be a frustrating, discouraging review. Towards the end of our discussions--and seemingly out of the blue--one of the students offered a story about rhinoceros horns. It seems that the African rhinoceros is becoming extinct. This condition has been caused in large part because of the intense demand and willingness to pay a great deal of money

for the rhinoceros horn in certain parts of the world. In order to protect the remaining animals, African governments have taken extraordinary steps--to include placing armed guards on the animals. Although these steps served to make the horns more difficult to obtain and even more valuable, suppliers were willing to take the extra risk in return for the higher fee they then charged and received. The rhinoceros killings continued. In fact, the only efforts that proved to be even modestly effective were efforts to explain the broader problem to those who wanted the horns and to suggest alternatives to meet their needs.<sup>1</sup>

As we look at our drug problem in the United States and the most publicized efforts to attack it, the lessons from the rhinoceros story seem particularly relevant. The US solution to our drug problem seeks primarily to address the "supply" end of the problem, as was the case with our rhinoceros story. These "supply side" efforts will not bring success as long as there is a demand that is willing to pay the price for the item. Put more bluntly, the drug problem in the United States cannot be solved in the coca or marijuana fields of Latin America. Our drug problem must be ultimately solved inside the United States.

I believe the acceptance and understanding of this point is vital to choosing the right courses of action for Central America. Most importantly, these choices must be oriented to and fully support the basis developed in PART 1.

These foreign policy choices must also genuinely become part of the domestic solution to our drug problem in the United States. Using these criteria to review our efforts, I believe that some past and ongoing anti-drug programs are seriously flawed and have served to diminish US interests in the region without substantially helping the problem. In particular:

- o The overall thrust of the anti-drug program, (interdiction, eradication, certification<sup>2</sup>), tends to focus on Latin America as the source of the US drug problem. This thrust produces resentment in Latin American countries who see themselves as wrongly being cast as the scapegoat for what is fundamentally a US problem. If "responsibility" is a characteristic we seek to foster in these developing countries, we should start by setting the example and accepting responsibility for our own drug problem.

- o The Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) efforts in Latin America to develop, train and employ para-military units to interdict the drug supply at its source have gone far beyond the levels of useful or helpful assistance. This overt US presence, and often leadership, serves to undermine the legitimacy and authority of the governments we are "assisting."

- o The US policy has not been primarily focused, nor been particularly successful, in helping these countries

deal with the problems that drug traffic and use causes in their own countries.

o The Congressional certification process is viewed as intrusive and demeaning to Latin American countries. Its impact on United States foreign policy is not helpful and its benefit to the US drug problem is not obvious.

I believe the right policy separates the problem and the solution into two distinct parts--the problem in the United States and the problem in Latin America. The problem in the United States is ours, and that should be the primary focus of solutions to the US "drug war." The problem in Latin America is theirs--albeit a problem that directly affects us--and we can and should assist those countries as they seek to solve their problems. This distinction and linkage is important and useful. For it is certainly true that as we help Latin American countries make progress in solving their drug problems, this progress is helpful to us. It is even more significant that as we solve our problem in the United States, we will assist them in solving theirs. So while the problems and solutions are not independent, it is important to realize that the problem has two parts. We are responsible for one, the Latin American countries must be responsible for the other. United States drug policy for Central America should center on assisting those countries to develop the law enforcement, judicial, and education mechanisms to attack the problem. The presence of the drug

culture in these countries is a corrosive influence on the society and is damaging to the development we seek. We can and should exert strong leverage to encourage aggressive, effective actions to solve these problems.

In particular, I believe the United States should:

- o Discontinue the Congressional "certification" process. The public airing of these matters does not achieve the results we are seeking and often is extremely harmful to other foreign policy efforts. The United States has ample leverage to make our point with these countries. Useful leverage is not normally applied in the public domain, and in this case proves the norm.

- o Get the DEA out of the para-military business in Peru and Bolivia. Our DEA efforts extend beyond the advisory level and damage the development objectives of the proposed foreign policy basis. These DEA advisors should be withdrawn and only reintroduced in their more traditional intelligence gathering role as part of a coordinated foreign policy strategy in the region.

- o Shift the public focus of the anti-drug campaign to the "demand side" problem in the United States. Recent public opinion polls suggest that Americans feel sufficiently threatened by drugs to bite this bullet and accept more user sanctions and education efforts. This public focus in the United States would allow the "public"

foreign policy efforts to focus on the positive forms of genuine developmental assistance while using our leverage in the region more effectively.

o Continue providing anti-narcotics assistance (education, training, equipment, etc.) to countries seeking to solve their problem. Direct US support, (e.g. eradication spraying), should be considered carefully if requested and conducted with the primary goal of developing that capability within the country itself.

I discussed the drug issue first because I believe it serves as a useful example of the basic dilemma between positive and negative aspects of our foreign policy in the region. If we could imagine a Central America with effective, responsible governments, it is difficult to see the drug problem in its current light. The right foreign policy goal is to help and encourage these countries to address and solve their own problems. It is always tempting to want to step in and remove these problems (threats) ourselves--for we usually can fix the immediate problem. But the small tactical victories are of little value if the root causes of the problem remain, recall the finger in the dike analogy. Our tactical intervention in Central America's problems is ultimately harmful to our larger policy objective.

## II. Low Intensity Conflict can be pretty intense.

As in so many areas in life, where you stand depends in large part on where you sit. There has recently emerged in the United States a reawareness of insurgency and counterinsurgency warfare. The momentum for these ideas has been so strong that now they are often cited as a new dimension of United States national strategy. The broad title given to these topics in the current discussions is "Low Intensity Conflict".) Unfortunately for the people in the affected countries, the conflict is sometimes very intense. ✓

One of the great tragedies in Central America is the seemingly endless insurgencies--wars--that exist throughout the region. The United States policy in this area has been diverse--we supported the insurgents in Nicaragua, the governments in El Salvador and Honduras and have been essentially a non-player in Guatemala. In particular, the US support for the Contras became the center of the extremely divisive debate within the Congress, the American public and the countries of the region--and essentially pushed all other issues to the side. While a bipartisan consensus regarding US support for the Contras now appears to be emerging, there remain many tough issues regarding the other insurgencies in the region. I believe our basis from PART I is useful for shaping US policy choices with regards

to insurgency. But first, it will be helpful to pause and review two points concerning these Central American insurgencies.

The current insurgencies in Latin America received their boost in the early 60's with the consolidating of Fidel Castro's power in Cuba and his support for revolutionary change throughout Latin America. It is important to note that in recent times the Castro strategy which succeeded in Cuba--the military focus strategy--only succeeded once. .Despite several attempts to replicate it in the region, the Cuban military focus strategy has not worked. The insurgents in Guatemala were decisively defeated in 1972. When guerrillas in Guatemala and El Salvador stepped up their activities in the early 80's following the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua,<sup>2</sup> they were again effectively contained.

Second, I believe it is useful to note the nature of the insurgencies in the region. Although it is common to refer to these insurgencies as "Marxist", that description masks their exact nature. It is certainly true that the dominant leaders in these insurgent groups express a commitment to Marxism-Leninism. Most received their training in Cuba, (the military focus strategy), and most have a strong Marxist-Leninist ideological bias. It is also no doubt true that most rank and file guerrillas have no ideological bias. They are fighting because of the



hopelessness of their existence--for a personal human dignity. Most don't care about the form of government in their country. Instead, they only care that they are able to live a decent life. (The real tragedy is that they end up fighting for a system that can't give them what they seek).

With these two reflections as a background, we can seek to shape the directions our policies should take. As was the case with the drug problem, I believe it is important to separate the dimensions of the problem into its internal and the external components. Using our foreign policy basis from PART 1, it is clear that The US must expect each country to accept responsibility for conducting its own internal counterinsurgency effort--an effort that the United States can and should assist. The United States also can and should unilaterally take appropriate action to influence the external problem. We can and should use our leverage with these outside countries to cease their support for insurgencies in the region. ✓

With regard to our support to Central American countries in their counterinsurgency actions, clearly our support is important--sometimes essential--and should continue. But the nature of this support must fundamentally support the broader national development objectives. The counterinsurgency problem is both a military and a social one, and the solution involves action on both fronts.

I believe in particular that the social dimension to the counterinsurgency efforts in Central America is becoming vitally important. As mentioned earlier, the military focus strategy has been a resounding failure in the region. There appear signs now, however, of an emerging shift by the insurgents to the protracted popular war strategy--the strategy that was successful in China, Vietnam and arguably in Nicaragua. The recent political moves by the FMLN in El Salvador indicate this possible move toward a new strategy in that conflict. These shifts are important because if true, the government's response must shift to compete for the support of the populace as a specific part of their counterinsurgency strategy, (an action that is less important when dealing with a military focus strategy). This strategy shift, plus the "exoteric" appeal (i.e. concrete grievances) to the rank and file guerrillas lead to the obvious imperative to deal with social grievances as a priority concern.<sup>3</sup>

In particular, US policy choices should follow these guidelines:

- o We must use the leverage of our support to seek progress in both areas, military and social.

- o We must avoid the inclination to jump in and try to solve the problem ourselves, as we ultimately did in Vietnam and with the Contras. These inclinations are harmful to the broader policy objective.

o We shouldn't be afraid of a "populist" or "leftist" government if that government is legitimate and more able to provide the development that the countries need.<sup>4</sup>

o We should consider carefully and be prepared to terminate support for a regime that fails to move toward the development of human rights objectives.<sup>5</sup>

o Finally, we must remember that the more openly the United States is involved in supporting the government's counterinsurgency operations, especially with military support, the more we unify the opposition. In most countries, these opposition forces consist of several factions who often do not agree on the goals and strategies of their opposition. Opposition to the United States can become a great unifying theme, thereby actually hindering the counterinsurgency effort.<sup>6</sup>

The recent compromise between the Bush Administration and the Congress is cause for hope that we can soon put the Contra problem behind us. But the problems of insurgency remain throughout Central America, and additional wise choices will be required in future decisions. I believe the nature of our military support to El Salvador has been appropriate and consistent with our basis. I do not see evidence, however, that we have sufficiently emphasized the importance of the social dimension in that conflict.<sup>7</sup> The government in El Salvador cannot succeed without solving the legitimate grievances of its people.

### III. Some final thoughts on development.

It is clear that the key to progress in economic, political and social development begins with the will of the governments to seek this development. For in every case, development requires the redistribution of power and influence within the country, and therefore those with power will tend to resist the changes. Our leverage must be used to strengthen that will for evolutionary change.

But if the will to change is a difficult but essential first step, it is not always enough. These Central American countries lack the technical knowledge, experience and resources that exist in the developed countries. US assistance can and should play a vital role in meeting this need. And while our assistance often is reduced to a number of "things" that we provide to a country, we should never forget that these tangible fruits of our aid are important only as they contribute to the broader development goals outlined throughout this paper. I offer some reflections on economic, social and political development in this broader context.

#### A. Economic.

o The debt problem in the region is routinely and correctly cited as a crippling obstacle to economic development in Latin America. Because the Central American countries are so small, their lower gross debt often leaves

the perception that this isn't as large a problem in Central America as it is in other countries. (Certainly for the lenders who are worried about repayment, they are a smaller problem.) Yet, when looking at the numbers on a per capita basis, these countries move well up on the list (especially Costa Rica). Debt is in fact a key problem for several countries in the region. But the solution of the debt problem--even though it is an essential precondition to development--won't produce economic development. The unfortunate decisions which produced the debt resulted from the economic system which still exists in these countries. Thus, while we should applaud and encourage the emerging debt reduction ideas as important steps to remove a key obstacle to national development, these efforts in themselves do not move us toward that goal.

o A developing country needs a physical basis, an infrastructure, on which to base this economic development. As mentioned earlier, this is often viewed only in terms of physical outputs, (e.g. roads, schools, water projects, etc.), rather than as an instrument of nation building. In the United States, we first turned to the US Army (the Army's Corps of Engineers), to provide much of this work. I believe this US experience provides the right basis for pursuing this dimension of development in Central America. I suggest that the Corps of Engineers be given the responsibility for developing a capability to assist the Central American countries to develop their own "Corps of

Engineers." This concept should be tested in one or two of the countries in the region, and then expanded as deemed appropriate by the results.<sup>8</sup>

#### B. Social.

o The United States can make an important contribution to social progress in its interaction with the military in these countries, especially the young officers. The military tradition in these countries is not one of identity with the people. Our military assistance and training can be an important lever to promote western values in the military officers in these countries. The earlier suggestion concerning the use of Army engineers in the nation building process would be an excellent example of this idea.

#### C. Political.

o This becomes the most difficult dimension to affect overtly. This political dimension defines the essence of a government, and US leverage inevitably smacks of unwarranted intervention into the internal affairs of a country. Nonetheless, progress in this area, especially the integrity of the judicial system, should be a major factor when considering assistance to a country. It is questionable if a country who cannot or will not progress in the political dimension has the will that is essential for progress.

History shows that a government which lacks such will eventually fails.

#### IV. What about the big picture?

The global context. This paper almost naively avoids the east-west dimension to the problem in Central America. There are two reasons for this:

1. I do not believe the Soviet Union has an abiding interest in the region. I believe their major goal in the region is to make mischief for the United States, thereby distracting our energies from more important geostrategic issues.

2. I believe the best way to address east-west issues is to deal directly with the Soviet Union. For instance, the most effective way to influence Soviet activity in Central America lies probably in actions we could take in Eastern Europe.<sup>9</sup>

The fact that a Central American country is warming to the Russians or Cubans is not in itself a bad sign. If this "warmth" results in policies which are not in our interests, we should deal with the Central American countries with reference to those policies, not their ideological basis.

The Regional Context. The emergence of the ability of the five presidents to propose regional solutions should be

encouraged. This seems to me to be a major step in their evolution to more responsible governments. If we have disagreements over a particular policy, we should ensure that they understand our views and the possible consequences of choosing options which harm our interests. But if they choose an option because it best meets their interests, we should view that as an enormous step forward in their development.

If our basis for United States foreign policy were adopted, the Organization of American States (OAS) could offer promise for regional action on problems facing the hemisphere. It would have to be a different kind of OAS--with a less dominant United States. It could provide an alternative to the United Nations when issues suggest a "multilateral" solution.

The National Context. This has been the focus of this paper. I have argued that the long term interests of the United States are best served if the countries in Central America become responsible and self-sufficient nations, and that all of our policy choices must be ultimately judged in regards to their positive contribution to that goal. I have tried to point out the difficulties inherent in this approach--particularly the fact that their culture is so different from ours and the danger of always being viewed as intervening in their affairs. I simply believe that if we genuinely frame our policy choices to support this policy



objective that these difficulties will be overcome. It will be a long and frustrating process, but it can succeed.

A final point. PART 2 of this paper is not intended to be a comprehensive critique of United States policy with regards to Central America. I frankly don't know enough about these issues to be able to make that kind of claim. I did intend to show that the basis developed in PART 1 could be reasonably applied to the tough issues facing the United States in this region. The possibility that my analysis in PART 2 may be incomplete wasn't vital to my purposes. If readers can apply the basis with more complete knowledge of the issues and thereby develop even better options, then this paper has truly served its purpose.

## ENDNOTES

### PART 1.

1. These three reasons were adapted from the statement of US interests in the January 1988 document of the National Security Strategy of the United States. These interests are included at Annex A.

2. The preceeding discussion is based in large part on the statement of US interests in Central America as described in the January 1984 Report of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America, (the "Kissenger Commission"). This statement is included at Annex B.

3. I merely note here that if we are successful, we would free up the national energy and resources to tackle the more important interests in this hemisphere--our interests with the larger countries in Latin America who represent the vast majority of the region's people and resources. This reflection is consistent with the main theme of Abraham Lowenthal's article, "No Longer Central", in the January 1988 issue of Foreign Service Journal, pp 22-28.

4. This conversation took place with COL Wes Ludwig in the locker room of the 1st Brigade Gym, Ft Leonard Wood, MO.

5. This discussion of interests from the Central American perspective were derived from notes taken at lectures at the National War College by prominent regional experts. While the text in this paper is my own, I am confident that my discussion fairly represents these interests.

6. The basic outline for this discussion was taken from Jacqueline A Braveboy-Wagner's book INTERPRETING THE THIRD WORLD Politics, Economics, and Social Issues, p 194. The development of the text to support the outline is my own.

### PART 2.

1. I am told that this story has appeared in many places. This version was offered by LTC Dave Wilson, US Army, in a class at the National War College.

2. This certification refers to the requirement in the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 for the Administration to "certify" to the Congress that the major narcotics producing or trafficking countries have cooperated fully with the United States, or taken adequate steps on their own to

PART I

1. The \_\_\_\_\_  
US in \_\_\_\_\_  
Security \_\_\_\_\_  
include \_\_\_\_\_

2. The \_\_\_\_\_  
statement \_\_\_\_\_  
the \_\_\_\_\_  
Commission \_\_\_\_\_  
This \_\_\_\_\_

3. I \_\_\_\_\_  
free \_\_\_\_\_  
important \_\_\_\_\_  
the \_\_\_\_\_  
majority \_\_\_\_\_  
reflected \_\_\_\_\_  
Lowenthal \_\_\_\_\_  
1988 \_\_\_\_\_

4. This \_\_\_\_\_  
locker \_\_\_\_\_

5. This \_\_\_\_\_  
person \_\_\_\_\_  
National \_\_\_\_\_  
the \_\_\_\_\_  
discussion \_\_\_\_\_

6. The \_\_\_\_\_  
Jacques \_\_\_\_\_  
WORLI \_\_\_\_\_  
development \_\_\_\_\_

PART II

1. I \_\_\_\_\_  
This \_\_\_\_\_  
class \_\_\_\_\_

2. This \_\_\_\_\_  
Anti-Immigration \_\_\_\_\_  
"center" \_\_\_\_\_  
on the \_\_\_\_\_  
United \_\_\_\_\_

~~=====~~ was taken from a draft Army War College  
~~=====~~ Development Assistance: The Engineer  
~~=====~~ Plan by LTC Tommy Lundberg and LTC Robert  
~~=====~~

~~=====~~ This section generally follow the approach  
~~=====~~ Law Brzezinski in his book, Game Plan.

## ANNEX A: U. S. INTERESTS

This annex contains the statement of US interests as described in the January 1988 edition of the National Security Strategy of the United States, p 3.

"Our National Security Strategy reflects our national interests and presents a broad plan for achieving the national objectives that support those interests. The key national interests which our strategy seeks to assure and protect include:

1. The survival of the United States as a free and independent nation, with its fundamental values intact and its institutions and people secure.
2. A healthy and growing U.S. economy to provide opportunity for individual prosperity and a resource base for our national endeavors.
3. A stable and secure world, free of major threats to U.S. interests.
4. The growth of human freedom, democratic institutions, and free market economies throughout the world, linked by a fair and open international trading system.
5. Healthy and vigorous alliance relationships."

## ANNEX B: U.S. INTERESTS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

This annex contains the statement of U.S. interests in Central America as contained in the January 1984 Report of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America, p37-38.

### "U.S. Interests in the Crisis

When strategic interests conflict with moral interests, the clash presents one of the classic challenges to confront societies and statesman. But in Central America today, our strategic and moral interests coincide. We shall deal later in the report with the specifics of those interests. But in broad terms they must include:

- \* To preserve the moral authority of the United States. To be perceived by others as a nation that does what is right because it is right is one of this country's principal assets.
- \* To improve the living conditions of the people of Central America. They are neighbors. Their human need is tinder waiting to be ignited. And if it is, the conflagration could threaten the entire hemisphere.
- \* To advance the cause of democracy, broadly defined, within the hemisphere.
- \* To strengthen the hemispheric system by strengthening what is now, in both economic and social terms, one of its weakest links.
- \* To promote peaceful change in Central America while resisting the violation of democracy by force and terrorism.
- \* To prevent hostile forces from seizing and expanding control in a strategically vital area of the Western Hemisphere.
- \* To bar the Soviet Union from consolidating either directly or through Cuba a hostile foothold on the American continents in order to advance its strategic purposes."